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ABSTRACT

A study examined the role of elementary and secondary school librarians/media specialists in Alabama in promoting reading growth, assisting classroom teachers, and teaching reading skills. Surveys were sent to all public school librarians in Alabama, and to their administrators. Results, based on 250 randomly selected surveys from librarians and 36 surveys from administrators, indicated that: (1) teaching library-related skills and encouraging recreational reading ranked high in the priorities of both librarians and administrators; (2) librarians would like to be more involved in planning with teachers for the coordination of reading programs, the use of content area resources, and selection of basal reading materials--and administrators agreed; (3) administrators' and librarians' perceptions differed regarding the percentage of time spent in various activities. Overall, the survey indicated that librarians would like to be more involved in the planning and evaluation of the reading program and and would like to spend less time in the instruction of specific reading skills. (Eight tables of data are included.) (SR)

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LIBRARIANS: THE KEY TO A COMPREHENSIVE READING PROGRAM

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Librarians: The Key to a Comprehensive Reading Program

The U. S. Library of Congress has declared 1989 as the "Year of the Young Reader." Everyone is focusing on reading -- from state governors and legislatures to boards of education to community groups and parents as well as professional educators. At a time when literacy is more important than ever, national and state attention has refocused on reading to assure that every child has the opportunity to learn this critical process. A renewed effort is being made to put into practice some of the recommendations of the 1985 report Becoming a Nation of Readers.

One of the major points of the report was that schools should inspire students to become lifetime readers. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (1985) gives additional support to this need. The NAEP report found that while 99 percent of seventeen year olds had basic reading skills, only 39 percent of them could perform higher level reading skills. Only 5 percent of this group could perform such critical skills as the synthesis of information from a reading source. In order to build a nation of readers who have the skills to function in the real world, schools must instill in children a love of reading. This can only be done when the responsibility for development of reading skills is shared by all school professionals. For years the classroom teacher has been solely responsible for reading instruction. Today the classroom

teacher is only one part of the educational team who are all concerned about the development of reading skills. Among those who should be instrumental and play a key role in the total reading program are the school librarians/media specialists. However, the research literature does not indicate that librarians/media specialists play such a vital role in the reading programs of today's schools.

With the renewed emphasis on reading today, the role of librarians/media specialists becomes more important. They may serve as a major resource for the reading program, provide actual instruction in reading skills and/or foster recreational reading.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of school librarians/media specialists (elementary and secondary) in Alabama. A survey was conducted specifically to determine the role of librarians/media specialists in:

1) promoting reading growth

2) assisting classroom teachers

3) teaching reading skills.

The study investigated the librarian/media specialist's role from the perspective of the librarian/media specialist and the school administrator. The specific questions addressed in the study included:

1) In what way(s) does the librarian/media specialist contribute to the total reading program within the school?

2) What does the administrator expect from the librarian/media

specialist in relation to reading instruction?

3) How does the librarian/media specialist contribute to the development of a literate environment?

4) What academic preparation do librarians/media specialists have in the area of reading?

A total of 1257 surveys were sent to all public school librarians, and corresponding surveys were also sent to their administrators. By October 25, 1989, 546 surveys were returned by the librarians and 36 were returned by the administrators. The respondents were asked questions regarding the librarians/media specialists' roles in the reading program. For example, the librarians/media specialists were asked what types of reading skills they taught; the frequency of instruction; and in what other ways they promoted the literacy development of their students. Administrators were asked similar questions aimed at determining their support of the librarian/media specialist's contributions to the reading program. Demographic information was also requested which allowed comparisons between urban and rural schools and between various sizes of schools.

The results presented in this paper represent tentative conclusions based on 250 randomly selected surveys from the librarians; all 36 surveys from administrators were analyzed. Of the 250 librarian surveys analyzed for this paper, 130 were received from elementary schools; 33 from middle and junior high schools; 49 from high schools; and 41 from other classifications such as K-9 or K-12. Of the administrators'

surveys, 27 of the 36 were from elementary schools; four from middle and junior high schools, two from high schools, and three from other classifications. Schools surveyed represented student populations of 100-1000 with 50 percent of all responses indicating student populations in the 500-1000 range.

Of the librarians responding, 219 had full time positions. Thirteen even reported having two full time library positions at their schools. Twenty-seven of the 36 administrators had full time librarians. Both administrators and librarians indicated some use of part time librarians and volunteers or paid aides. Student aides were utilized in about 50 percent of the libraries of both administrators and librarians surveyed. Only two schools reported that did not have a librarian

Academic preparation of both librarians and administrators in the area of reading was encouraging. All but a small percent had at least one course in reading methods, as Table 1 indicates.

TABLE 1

ACADEMIC PREPARATION OF LIBRARIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS

COURSES	LIBRARIANS (n:250)	ADMINISTRATORS (n:36)
Childrens' Literature	82.0%	52.7%
Elementary Reading Methods	51.2%	72.2%
Secondary Reading Methods	31.6%	33.3%
Diagnosis of Reading Difficulties	22.8%	41.6%
Content Area Reading Methods	42.0%	44.4%
None	1.2%	13.8%
Other	30.8%	22.2%

The main focus of this paper was to analyze the actual and ideal responsibilities of school librarians with special emphasis on those activities related to reading. Responses from administrators and librarians were compared to determine if their perceptions were similar. An average percent of time spent in each activity was calculated to determine how librarians actually spend their time and how they would ideally spend their time.

The following tables (Tables 2,3,4,5) contain a rank order listing based on the average percent of time spent in each activity.

Even though there are differences in the rank order of the activities by administrators and librarians, some similarities do exist.

1) Teaching library related skills ranked high in all comparisons. In fact, questions concerning specific library skills revealed that both librarians and administrators believe that the teaching of location skills, use of reference materials, and the selection of appropriate books should receive priority.

2) Encouraging recreational reading was ranked high by administrators and librarians. The ideal perception of librarians was that recreational reading should rank first, and the administrators' perception is that it should rank second only to instruction in library skills. Although recreational reading received a high ranking, specific questions related to instruction of study skills and reading skills received less support from librarians than from administrators.

TABLE 2

LIBRARIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

	Activities	Average Percent of Time Spent
1.	Selects new library resources	48.5
2.	Instructs children in library related skills	46.2
3.	Assists children in locating books/ printed materials	43.7
* 4.	Encourages recreational reading	42.5
5.	Catalogs and accessions materials	41.2
6.	Checks in/checks out	40.7
7.	Manages and distributes audio visual equipment	40.3
* 8.	Reads to children	36.6
* 9.	Participates in Young Readers Choice Award Program	33.7
10.	Assists teachers in locating audio visual materials	33.0
11.	Assists teachers in locating books and printed materials	31.7
12.	Attends professional workshops	31.1
*13.	Plans with teachers for use of content area materials	23.1
14.	Assists children in locating audio visual materials	19.1
*15.	Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	17.2
*16.	Assists in the evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	13.0
17.	Provides in-service for instructional staff	12.9
18.	Instructs children in non-library, regular classroom	8.5

* Reading-related activities

TABLE 3

LIBRARIANS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR IDEAL RESPONSIBILITIES

	Activities	Average Percent of Time Spent
* 1.	Encourages recreational reading	52.8
2.	Selects new library resources	52.4
3.	Assists students in locating books/ printed materials	47.6
4.	Instructs children in library related skills	47.5
* 5.	Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	39.6
6.	Assists teachers in locating books/ printed materials	38.9
7.	Assists teachers in locating audio visual materials	38.7
* 8.	Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	36.1
9.	Attends professional workshops	33.5
10.	Catalogs and accessions materials	33.0
11.	Assists students in locating audio visual materials	33.0
*12.	Reads to children	32.3
13.	Manages and distributes audio visual equipment	29.1
*14.	Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	28.7
*15.	Participates in Young Readers Choice Award Program	28.3
16.	Checks in/checks out	27.3
17.	Provides inservice instruction for staff	25.1
18.	Instructs children in non-library, regular classroom	6.3

*Reading-related activities

TABLE 4

THE ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRARIANS' ACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

	Activities	Average Percent of Time Spent
1.	Instructs children in library-related skills	38.8
2.	Selects new library resources	34.4
3.	Catalogs/accessions materials	33.8
4.	Checks in/checks out	33.8
5.	Assists in locating books/printed materials for children	33.8
* 6.	Encourages recreational reading	33.1
7.	Manages and distributes audio visual materials	28.8
* 8.	Reads to children	24.7
* 9.	Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	24.0
10.	Assists teachers in locating books/ printed materials	23.8
11.	Assists teachers in locating audio visual materials	23.8
12.	Attends professional workshops	23.1
*13.	Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	20.6
*14.	Participates in Young Readers Choice Awards	17.5
15.	Assists children in locating audio visual materials	15.3
*16.	Assists in the evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	14.4
17.	Provides in-service for instructional staff	12.2
18.	Instructs children in non-library, regular classroom	10.0

*Reading-related activities

TABLE 5

THE ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRARIANS' IDEAL RESPONSIBILITIES

	Activities	Average Percent of Time Spent
1.	Instruct children in library related skills	44.8
* 2.	Encourages recreational reading	41.9
3.	Selects new library resources	41.9
* 4.	Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	33.9
5.	Attends professional workshops	33.5
6.	Assists students in locating books/ printed materials	32.6
* 7.	Reads to students	31.0
8.	Catalogs/accessions materials	28.7
* 9.	Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	28.1
*10.	Participates in Young Readers Choice Award Program	27.3
*11.	Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	26.8
12.	Manages and distributes audio visual materials	24.8
13.	Assists teachers in locating books/printed materials	23.9
14.	Checks in/Checks out	23.5
15.	Assists teachers in locating audio visual materials	22.6
16.	Provides in-service for instructional staff	20.6
17.	Assists students in locating audio visual materials	18.1
18.	Instructs children in non-library, regular classroom	8.9

*Reading-related activities

3) Selecting new library resources also ranked very high.

4) Providing inservice for the instructional staff and instruction in non-library related areas were ranked very low.

A comparison of the librarians' perceptions of their actual and ideal responsibilities (Table 6) revealed the following:

1) Librarians would like to be more involved in planning with teachers for the coordination of reading programs; for the use of content area resources; and selection of basal reading materials.

2) Librarians indicated a need to devote more time to the promotion of recreational reading.

3) Surprisingly, librarians thought less time should be spent reading to children.

4) Librarians want to spend less time checking books in and out; managing audio visual equipment; and instructing children in non-library related fields.

5) Librarians expressed a desire to devote less time to Alabama's Young Readers Choice Award program.

A comparison of the administrators' perceptions of the librarians' actual and ideal responsibilities (Table 6) revealed the following:

1) Administrators stated that librarians should spend more time in planning for the coordination of reading programs; planning for the use of content area resources, and in the selection of basal reading materials. This was in agreement with the librarians' perceptions.

2) Contrary to the librarians' desire to spend less time with

TABLE 6

COMPARISONS OF IDEAL AND ACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

ACTIVITIES	LIBRARIAN		ADMINISTRATOR	
	REAL	IDEAL	REAL	IDEAL
* 1. Reads to students	36.6	32.3	24.7	31.0
2. Assists students in locating books/printed materials	43.7	47.6	33.8	32.6
3. Assists students in locating audio visual materials	19.1	33.0	15.3	18.1
4. Assists teachers in locating books/printed materials	31.7	38.9	23.8	23.9
5. Assists teachers in locating audio visual materials	33.0	38.7	22.2	22.6
* 6. Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs	17.2	36.1	20.6	28.1
* 7. Plans with teachers for use of content area resources	23.1	39.6	24.1	33.9
8. Provides in-service for instructional staff	12.9	25.1	12.2	20.6
* 9. Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials	13.0	28.7	14.4	26.8
10. Selects new library resources	48.5	52.4	34.4	41.9
11. Checks in/checks out materials	40.7	27.3	33.8	23.5
12. Catalogs/accessions materials	41.2	33.0	33.8	28.7
*13. Motivates and encourages recreational reading	42.5	52.8	33.1	41.9

COMPARISONS OF IDEAL AND ACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES

	ACTIVITIES	LIBRARIAN		ADMINISTRATOR	
		REAL	IDEAL	REAL	IDEAL
14.	Manages and distributes audio visual equipment	40.3	29.1	28.8	24.8
15.	Attends professional workshops	31.1	33.5	23.1	33.5
*16.	Participates in Young Readers Choice Award Program	33.7	28.3	17.5	27.3
17.	Instructs children in library related skills	46.2	47.5	38.8	44.8
	a. location skills	97.3	100.0	96.0	100.0
	b. use of reference material	96.2	99.1	96.0	100.0
*	c. selection of appropriate books	96.1	97.3	92.9	100.0
*	d. study skills	57.7	65.3	82.1	89.3
*	e. reading skills	50.2	60.0	78.6	85.7
18.	Instructs children (in non-library related, regular classroom assignments)	8.5	6.3	10.0	8.9

* Reading-related activities

the Alabama Young Readers Choice Award program, administrators felt they should spend more time.

3) Administrators agreed with librarians that more time needs to be spent encouraging recreational reading.

4) Administrators also indicated that librarians should spend less time checking books in and out and managing audio visual equipment.

Examination of the responses indicated that differences existed between the perceptions of administrators and librarians regarding the percent of time spent in various activities (Tables 7,8).

1) Librarians indicated that a greater percent of time was spent assisting students and teachers than did the administrators, and that ideally this should be the case.

2) Librarians said that they actually spend more time in routine library activities than administrators said they did. The same trend appeared in their perceptions of ideal responsibilities.

3) Administrators believed that librarians spend less time in professional growth activities than librarians report.

4) Librarians and administrators agreed that librarians spend an appropriate amount of time instructing children in library related skills.

Tentative analysis of the surveys analyzed for this paper suggests the following:

1) Librarians would like to be more involved in the planning and evaluation of the reading program; however, they would like to spend less time in the instruction of specific reading skills.

TABLE 7

A COMPARISON OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRARIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING THE ACTUAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF LIBRARIANS

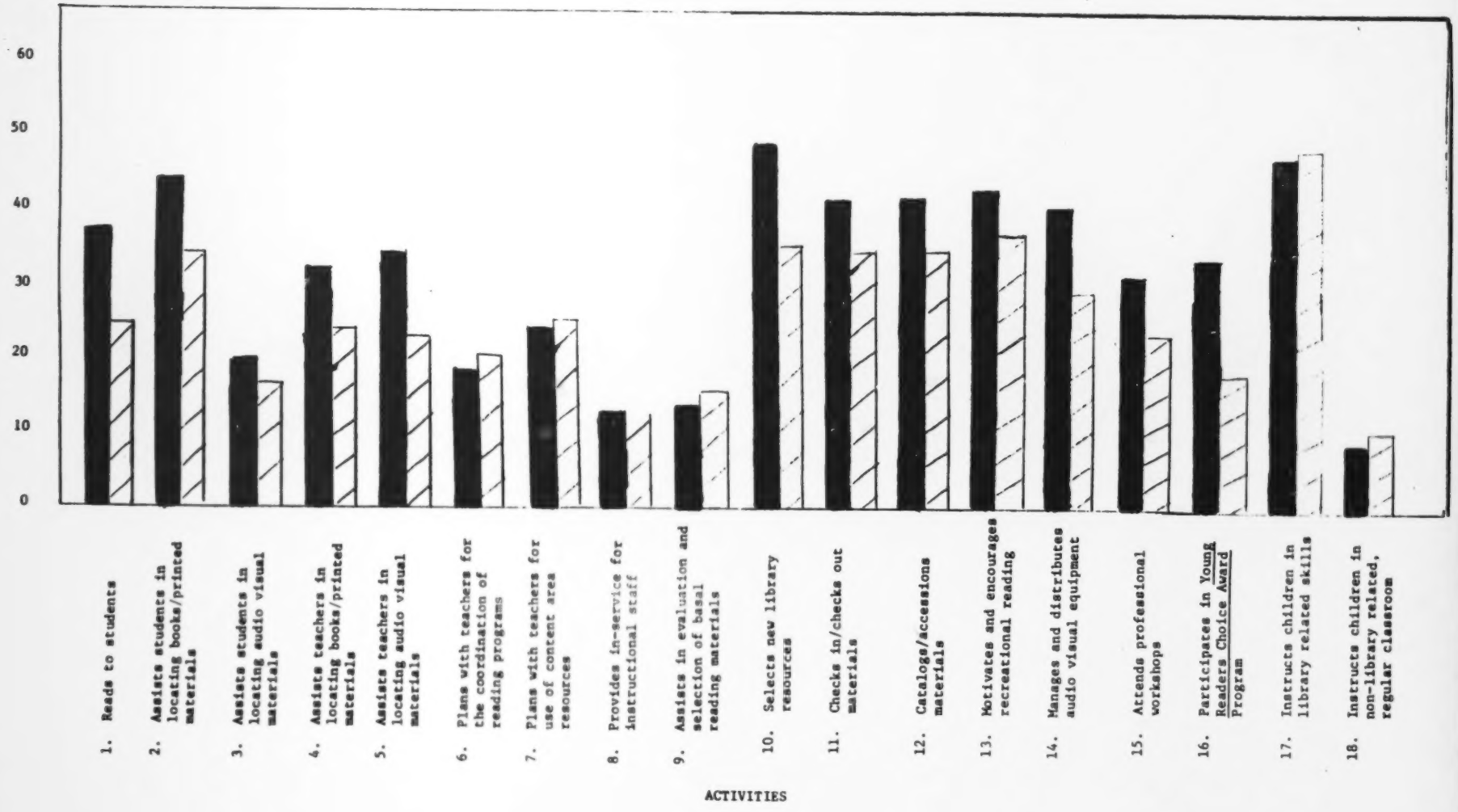
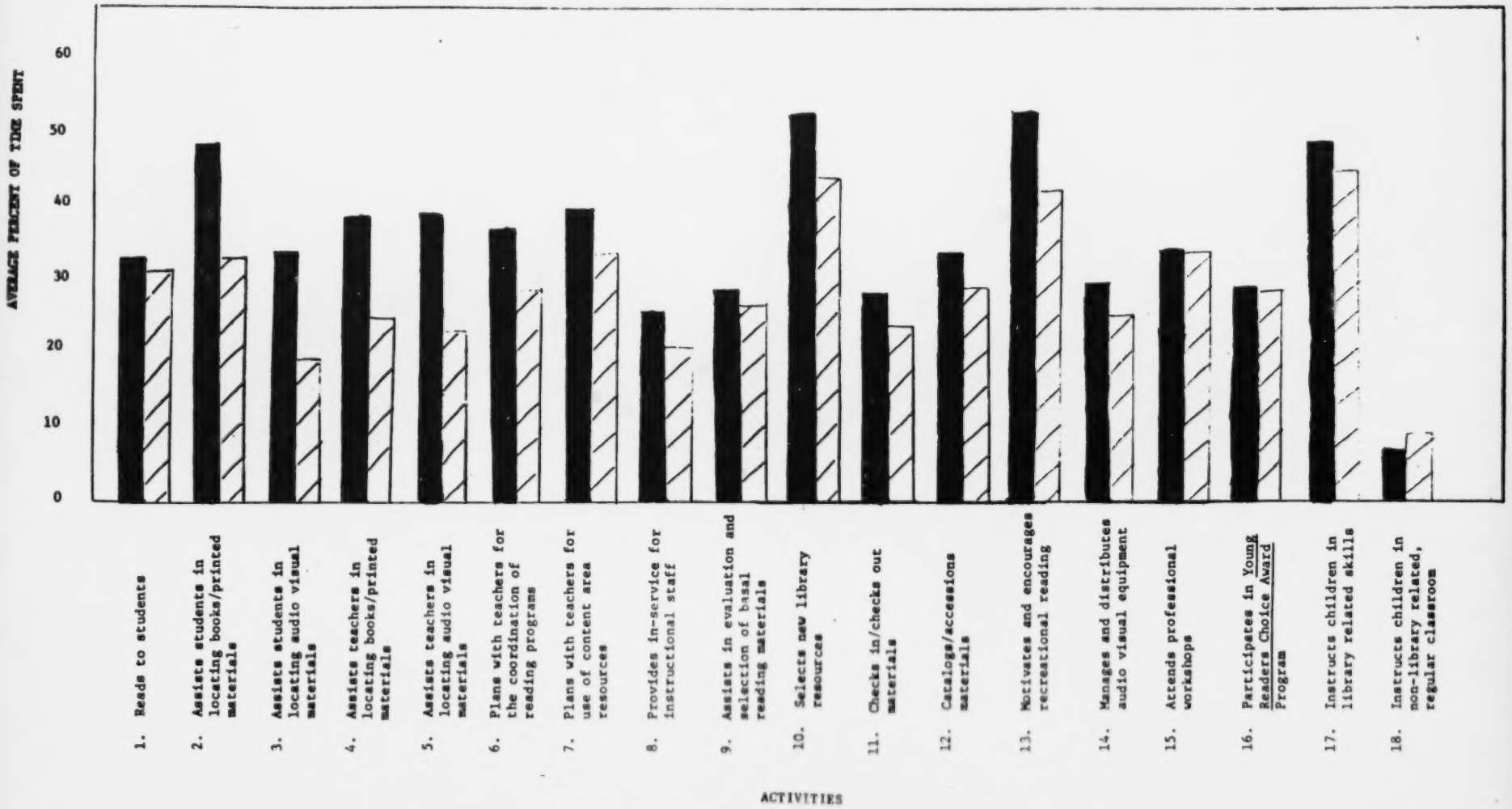

AVERAGE PERCENT OF TIME SPENT
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1. Reads to students
2. Assists students in locating books/printed materials
3. Assists students in locating audio visual materials
4. Assists teachers in locating books/printed materials
5. Assists teachers in locating audio visual materials
6. Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs
7. Plans with teachers for use of content area resources
8. Provides in-service for instructional staff
9. Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials
10. Selects new library resources
11. Checks in/checks out materials
12. Catalogs/accessions materials
13. Motivates and encourages recreational reading
14. Manages and distributes audio visual equipment
15. Attends professional workshops
16. Participates in Young Readers Choice Award Program
17. Instructs children in library related skills
18. Instructs children in non-library related, regular classroom
ACTIVITIES

TABLE 8

A COMPARISON OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRARIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING THE IDEAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF LIBRARIANS


AVERAGE PERCENT OF TIME SPENT
0
10
20
30
40
50
60
1. Reads to students
2. Assists students in locating books/printed materials
3. Assists students in locating audio visual materials
4. Assists teachers in locating books/printed materials
5. Assists teachers in locating audio visual materials
6. Plans with teachers for the coordination of reading programs
7. Plans with teachers for use of content area resources
8. Provides in-service for instructional staff
9. Assists in evaluation and selection of basal reading materials
10. Selects new library resources
11. Checks in/checks out materials
12. Catalogs/accessions materials
13. Motivates and encourages recreational reading
14. Manages and distributes audio visual equipment
15. Attends professional workshops
16. Participates in Young Readers Choice Award Program
17. Instructs children in library related skills
18. Instructs children in non-library related, regular classroom
ACTIVITIES

2) Administrators agreed that librarians should be more involved in the planning and evaluation of reading programs; however, they indicated a need for librarians to be more involved in the instruction of specific reading skills. This is in direct contrast to the librarians' perception.

3) Librarians and administrators agreed that a major role for the librarian is the promotion of literacy through the encouragement of recreational reading and assisting students in the selection of appropriate reading materials.

4) Both librarians and administrators appear to have a sound academic background in reading methodology.

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